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SUBJECT: COM REACHES OUT TO KOSOVO SERBS IN TOWN HALL  
MEETING

REF: A. PRISTINA 19

[1](#)B. PRISTINA 112

[1](#)C. 06 PRISTINA 1100

[1](#)D. PRISTINA 56

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. During a town hall meeting in Gracanica, Kosovo Serbs shared their practical concerns about implementation of the Ahtisaari package, economic development, security, and returns with the COM and EU representative Torbjorn Sohlstrom. COM described the many provisions in the document that will benefit Kosovo Serbs, and urged them to read and understand the entire document thoroughly. She assured them that the international community is united and determined to see that all of the rights and guarantees enshrined in the document will be implemented in practice. END SUMMARY.

COM URGES KOSOVO SERBS TO UNDERSTAND THE AHTISAARI DOCUMENT

[1](#)2. (SBU) On February 12, COM and EU representative Torbjorn Sohlstrom participated in a town hall meeting in Gracanica, organized by the Belgrade-based NGO Fraktal. They described the elements contained in UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari's package, particularly those providing special rights and guarantees to Kosovo Serbs, and responded to questions on issues including implementation, economic development, future international presence, political participation and returns. Among the Kosovo Serb attendees from Gracanica, Babin Most and other enclaves south of the Ibar, only one had actually read the proposal. COM urged them to look carefully at the document, which has been translated into Serbian by the Unity Team and is available on several websites, and share the understandings gained through the townhall discussion with friends and colleagues.

KOSOVO SERBS FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION AND THE ECONOMY

13. (SBU) During the meeting, Kosovo Serbs raised incisive questions and evinced serious concerns about what their lives will be like in a post-status Kosovo. None raised the issue of independence per se; rather, they focused on practical concerns such as security and prospects for economic development. Several pointed out that Kosovo institutions have not implemented already existing laws designed to protect Kosovo Serbs, and expressed their concern that the future Kosovo government will be unable or unwilling to put into practice the rights and guarantees offered by the package. Several, including the mother of a Kosovo Serb teenager killed several years ago in a drive-by shooting in Gračanica, asked about security; others queried about pensions from former state-owned enterprises and their right to reclaim usurped properties and businesses and return to their homes. One asked about international community plans to implement mass returns, while another pointed out perceived injustices related to the privatization of socially-owned enterprises. Referring to the violent Kosovo Albanian protest against Ahtisaari's proposal in Pristina on February 10 (ref B), one Serb asked whether the international community will be able to control such outbursts in the future, and whether it will succumb to pressure from Kosovo Albanians and accelerate the status process without proof that Albanians are willing to meet standards.

14. (SBU) A Serb businessman from Babin Most (ref A) expressed his disappointment that his enclave and several others would not be included in a Serb-majority municipality, maintaining that as a result, the document is "useless" to him. Other participants questioned whether Kosovo Serbs would have any real influence in government even if they agreed to take part in Kosovo institutions. A Serb doctor expressed his frustration over obstacles in accessing high quality medicines and other supplies from Serbia,

PRISTINA 00000118 002 OF 002

difficulties he attributed to Kosovar procedures. One participant asked whether there could be more Serb municipalities created in the future.

COM ASKS SERBS TO ENGAGE

15. (SBU) COM urged participants to understand that the Ahtisaari proposal is a robust mechanism for addressing many of their concerns, and said it affords strong rights and guarantees to all Kosovo Serbs, regardless of where they live. She said that the international community is united and determined to implement the proposal, adding that their rights will be enshrined in the constitution and noting that the sole purpose of establishing an international civilian office in Kosovo post-status is to ensure implementation of the document. COM and Sohlstrom explained that the status proposal allows Kosovo Serb municipalities to, among other things, manage their own healthcare systems, cooperate with one another and receive financial support from Serbia. COM emphasized repeatedly that violence will not be tolerated, and said that KFOR and UNMIK, and eventually the EU rule of law mission, will do whatever is necessary to maintain peace and order during the status process and beyond.

16. (SBU) COM reminded the Kosovo Serbs that their participation and engagement on all levels is key to realizing the rights being offered to them. She told them that Kosovo Serbs could have a decisive voice in the future government, if they participate in elections and win seats beyond the minimum ten that are guaranteed. She asked them to turn to established mechanisms such as the Kosovo Property Agency (KPA) for reclaiming property (ref C), and promised that the international community would continue its pressure on Kosovo's government to fulfill its obligations on property rights. COM also pointed out that the return process requires trust on both sides - Kosovo authorities must create the conditions for return, but displaced Serbs themselves must be willing to return. She noted the examples of Srpski Babush and Svinjare (ref D), where Kosovo authorities have

paid to rebuild homes for Serbs who have since refused to return and live in them. On economic development, COM made the case for privatization as an important step towards preserving and creating jobs, noting as an example the potential benefit that privatization of the Brezovica ski resort in the Serb-majority enclave of Strpce could bring if Serb leaders would agree to let it go forward.

17. (SBU) COMMENT. These central Kosovo Serbs seemed genuinely interested in learning about the status proposal and the rights it will grant them. Their questions were focused and thoughtful, though reflecting the difficult circumstances of their lives over the past eight years. There is considerably more room for such engagement; part of the public outreach campaign now underway is geared towards the spread of just such reassuring messages to a beleaguered and uncertain Serb population. USOP and COM will conduct more of these town hall meetings in coordination with Fraktal and other helpful NGOs who have lines into the Serb community. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.  
KAIDANOW